The Story of the Uintah Basin Indians

BY CHARLES E GIBSON

The Uintah Reservation was established by proclamation of Abraham Lincoln, dated October 3, 1861 The first agency headquarters were established in 1868 on the Duchesne river where Bridger Jims farm now is. It remained there for several years and was then removed to the mouth of Rock Creek, where it remained for two years and was moved to Whiterocks in 1871 It was moved to the present location at Fort Duchesne about 1908 when the Fort was abandoned by the War Department

The Uintah Reservation was intended to provide a place to live for the scattered tribes of Utes from all over the present state of Utah The word Uintah signifies "the place where pines come down to the river

The Ouray agency reservation was established in 1881 with headquarters at Ouray for the Uncompahgres who previous to that time lived around Montrose Colo on the Uncompahgre river The word Uncompahgre signifies "Red Lake

The Whiteriver Utes were moved to Whiterocks in the fall of 1880 They had previously lived on the White River in Colorado near where Meeker now is It is not known whether any trouble was experienced in moving the bands to their present location It is understood that the Whiterivers were rather loath to leave their ancient homes but were forced to do so as a result of the Meeker massacre

It is to be understood that the words Uintah Uncompahgre and Whiteriver do not signify three different tribes of Utes, but rather are arbitrary names assigned to what were originally many different bands and gens of Utes speaking the same language but otherwise roaming around each in his own territory This of course refers to the time before they were confined to the present reservation

The Utes at this time except in a few cases are not deemed far enough advanced in the way of the white man to defend themselves hence their allotted lands are held in trust for them by the government and they are not allowed to lease their own lands but this is done for them by the government through the Uintah and Ouray agency The government has furnished them farm tools, homes, seed etc so that they may farm their own allotments as far as possible and so learn to be self supporting Every encouragement is offered them to do this

They now have about 60 000 acres of allotted irrigable lands and about 360 000 acres of tribal lands fit only for grazing The present irrigation system was built for them largely from their tribal funds

There are about twelve hundred Indians on this reservation A large part of them live on their allotments, and others live on their lands during the crop season The tepee is fast giving place to the frame house You will find many good improved farms owned and operated by the Indians Many of the Indians carried off first awards in alfalfa seed and other farm products at the county state and national exhibitions Many of the Indians are good farmers and know how to use water to the best advantage

The Indian woman like her white sister is usually the poultry raiser Two little girls at the Uintah Boarding school won first premiums on chickens at the poultry exhibit a year ago and a large number of Indian girls of the school carried off premiums at the Uintah County Fair of recent years

Tony Garcia a full blood Indian raised 65 bushels of oats to the acre and 60 bushels of wheat this year Mr Garcia lives between Fort Duchesne and Whiterocks The oats were the leanest and best quality the writer has seen in the Basin

The government through the district and school farmers has been doing splendid work among the Indians during the past few years Many of the Indians have organized clubs and are trying to co-operate in farming and other branches This is especially noticeable in rising grain and garden products Many cellers have been built and have been filled with vegetables The Indians have learned that a well filled cellar in the fall means a well filled stomach in the winter The Indian women have learned to can and preserve fruit in order to have these dainties during the winter

The Indians are not a 'vanishing race as Zane Grey claims but are increasing in numbers This is due largely to the government aid in sanitary methods and in teaching them in the better ways of living

The Indians retain most of their tribal customs such as the Bear Dance Sun Dance and the like The Sun Dance is a religious festival and is carried on under the supervision of the medicine man. This dance is participated in by men only All who are sick and wish may join in the Sun Dance In this dance the ones taking part neither eat nor drink for seventy-two hours This is done as a sacrifice to the Sun God and petitions are sent up to the Great Spirit for healing It is the most beautiful of all the Indian dances For this dance a large circle enclosed and a pole set up in the center Around the circle and just inside booths are made for those taking part Just as the Sun shows on the eastern horizon on the appointed day the dance starts The Indians dance shuffle or trot from the booth to the dance pole at intervals of five minutes during the entire seventy two hours They are naked except for short trunks and a most elaborate apron The dance closes just as the sun begins to show in the east on the third day The medicine man then places his hand on each one and blesses him This dance is held in July They never use the same pole twice nor is any of the poles allowed to be destroyed There are around forty of these poles standing on the sun dance ground south of Whiterocks.

The Bear Dance is held in March as a rule and is a convivial festival men women and children all take part and whole people are often invited to join which by the way is a great honor

The Indians have many other traits and customs which are unique and interesting If you are a friend of theirs and go to their home you should walk right in without knocking If you knock at the door before entering there is some doubt about your friendship Most of the older ones prefer to sit and sleep on the floor rather than use chairs and beds of the white mens make The writer has called at a number of homes just at meal time and found them sitting on the floor in a circle with the food in the center from which each helped himself We have found the Indians kind sympathetic and always willing to assist in whatever way they can

The Ute Indians have no written language Most all other Indians have A large number of young men went from this reservation to aid their country during the World war Many of them gave their lives for their country Those who stayed at home did their full share in purchasing Liberty bonds to aid in the financial part of the war

That the Indian is now to be out done by his white brothers is again in evidence by the number of cars driven by the Reds You will find all makes of cars in the hands of Indians and they know how to handle them too They have as few accidents as anyone driving a car

The Indian is advancing in other lines too He is now using the regular white mens dress using white mens razors and clippers Most of the younger generation get their hair cut in the same styles as their white brothers and sisters and they wear just as stylish clothes

The Indian sign language is probably the first American language It is said to be older then the pyramids and is the most important gesture language the world has ever produced This interesting sign language is thought to have been born of necessity There were so many tribes in North America speaking so many tongues that when strange tribes met if they were friendly they had to exchange their few sentiments by signs with their hands As these occasional meetings grew the signs increased in number Soon the language grew to such an extent that tribesmen held councils agreed to and planned campaigns all with gestures Strangely enough, most of the signs in this silent language are exactly the same as the gestures the white man uses for emphasis

William Tomkins after nearly forty years of study and research has published a little book entitled Universal Indian Sign Language It is not a common dictionary It contains over 370 Indian sign words and their meanings all illustrated It is said to be the only authentic book published on the subject

The Indian never bothered to find signs for 'the' 'a' and 'an' All corrections are made either wholly or in part by the question sign Instead of saying Where are you going? the sign would be question you going etc The signs for which the heart—drawn from the question covers the words where heart—and their sign for the word when and why think is made by holding the right hand back on against the left breast, index finger extended and pointing to the left hand moving horizontally outwards about eight or ten inches

Indian [illegible] Uintah [illegible] [illegible] Indian, Uintah [illegible] Ft Duchesne

[illegible] of Indian Girls Purebred [illegible] [illegible] ng on the mountain range